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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the United States Military Academy at West Point produces consistently high standards of quality, discussing what teacher education can learn from the military. West Point's mission is to educate and train the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate shall have the attributes essential to professional growth throughout a career as an officer in the U.S. Army. West Point faculty include those who are similar to tenured faculty, rotating faculty, and civilian professors. West Point has a highly competitive cadet selection process, and class sizes are small. Each cadet is evaluated through the Leadership Evaluation and Development Ratings System. Professors regularly conference about and with cadets, providing continuous monitoring and assessment. Professors of student teachers are strongly involved in supervisory and developmental activities. Administration is totally autocratic, there is an established procedure for everything, and there is no academic freedom. After the first academic year, cadets become team leaders and are eventually promoted to cadet officers and begin to train new cadets. West Point is competitive with other programs (e.g., state universities with ROTC programs, which are less expensive). West Point is doing many of the educational tenets that are research validated, but often are not feasible in teacher education (e.g., small class size, integrated instruction, mentoring, hands-on applications, and cohort groups of students). (Contains 8 references.) (SM)

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Benchmarking Teacher Education:

What Can We Learn From the Military?

As teacher educators facing a changing society it is paramount that we look outside existing paradigms to see what is working for the rest of the training world. .This is key to any true benchmarking process (Tucker, 1996). The United States Military Academy at West Point is our nation's premiere military leadership training institution. It is recognized around the world for leadership development and military training. What are they doing to produce consistently high standards of quality? Is there anything teacher education can learn from the military?

According to West Point 2002 and Beyond (1993), the United States Military Academy was established in 1802, "to provide the nation with leaders of character who serve the common defense." It was established to produce engineers and military leaders to protect and serve the young country. Current practice is tradition bound, but also focused on leadership development, accreditation, continuous renewal, and cost effectiveness, similar to Schools of Education. As the nation's leader in producing military strategists, it is essential that West Point keep ahead of less expensive ROTC programs in other colleges. Schools of Education are facing similar problems as alternative certification programs continue to grow in popularity (Terry and McNiece, 1991).

A Journey in Becoming

The mission of West Point is to educate and train the Corps of

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Cadets so that each graduate shall have the attributes essential to professional growth throughout a career as an officer of the Regular Army and to inspire each to a lifetime of serve to the nation (United States Military Academy, 1993). The education a cadet receives is a four year value laden developmental process. Colonel George B. Forsythe, Vice Dean for Education, calls this a "journey in becoming," as cadets begin the life long process of leadership development (personal communication, March 28, 1996).

All cadets participate in a Core Curriculum of 31 courses which are a blend of math, science, engineering, humanities, behavioral and social sciences. They have a choice of an optional additional major or field of study. Each cadet also has a choice of completing one of seven engineering sequences prior to graduation. Similarly, teacher education candidates also must complete core course work prior to pedagogical training.

Faculty

West Point faculty are divided into three components. The first group are similar to tenured faculty, except West Point does not grant tenure. These faculty have terminal degrees and will likely stay at West Point until retirement. They are 100% military personnel and have previously had a distinguished career in the Army. The second group are rotating faculty. Each year West Point brings in young Army officers who have recently completed an advanced degree in their specialized area. This degree is paid for by the Army. These officers have also previously distinguished themselves as leaders in the field. They bring new ideas and

cutting edge technology to the program in addition to the credibility of being fresh from the Army trenches, actually leading troops, similar to many junior faculty in teacher education coming to the professorate with K - 12 experience. These Army faculty rotate in and out annually, on a senatorial model, which provides for smooth transitions, continuous new blood, and contemporary ideas. This constant rotation also serves to prevent faculty burnout or stagnation. This is different from teacher education where junior faculty, in addition to teaching and service, are actively seeking to achieve tenure through publishing research. The last group are civilian professors, which make up approximately 20% of the faculty. These highly competitive positions are usually professors from other leading universities who are coming to teach at West Point as a contracted service. Some visiting professors stay only a year, while others stay longer and are renewed. None have tenure or any hope of achieving it. They must also understand and accept the tremendous amount of time that is required of West Point faculty in mentoring cadets. All faculty are expected to provide guidance, tutoring, and supplemental help to assure maximum cadet success and character building. This combination of faculty is a result of their accrediting agency which strongly recommended more nonmilitary professors as well as more professors with terminal degrees.

A basic distinction between West Point and other universities is West Point does not project itself to be a research institution. Therefore, there is no pressure on faculty to publish or present

their findings at professional conferences or symposia. West Point feels the pressure to "publish or perish" is neither practical nor necessary to fulfil their mission. Thus, research is not a job requirement. Quality teaching and vast amounts of service through mentoring are. This is certainly a major difference from teacher preparation.

Student Selection

West Point has a highly competitive cadet selection process. It is limited by law to an enrollment of approximately 4,000. This provides for an average class size of 15 students. The enrollment cap is necessary to maintain the intense relationships required between faculty and students, particularly plebes or first year students. For example, each cadet is issued a personal networked computer for their barracks room. They are encouraged to e-mail their professors over difficulties with assignments or concepts, when doing homework. Professors must respond in a timely manner, thus preventing a loss of valuable class time spent reteaching. Obviously, this interaction is time burdensome on faculty which relates to the advantage of small class sizes. Another example is assigning faculty to plebes upon entrance to help them acclimate to the military environment. These relationships are particularly important as students have a specific mentor to turn to for guidance in academic and military areas as well as personal problems.

The Professional Development School model and other examples of field-based teacher education are also extremely time consuming,

heavy in service and mentoring, and can contribute to faculty burn-out. The mandated small class sizes as required at West Point could provide individualized attention also necessary to teacher education students as they learn pedagogy skills through application. Some colleges such as West Virginia University are addressing this issue by reducing the number of candidates they allow into teacher education. Other areas, such as Texas, which face a critical shortage of teachers do not have this luxury.

Cadet Evaluation

Each cadet is evaluated through the Leadership Evaluation and Development Ratings (LEADR) System. The Cadet Performance Score (CPS) is a blend of academic, military, and physical scores. Cadets must maintain a 2.00 Cumulative Academic Program Score (CumAPS), which is similar to a GPA. They must also regularly pass the stringent Army physical test and an elaborate timed indoor obstacle course. Military training occurs primarily in the summer in field-based settings. All course work during the academic year is directly tied to scenarios that are military related, thus linking theory to practice.

Professors regularly conference about and with each cadet, providing continuous monitoring and assessment. Cadets are often referred to the Center for Enhanced Performance which trains cadets in goal setting, self talk, positive visioning, and mental skills training. It can be used for academic, physical, or military enhancement, and to maximize potential success. If a student still does not perform satisfactorily, he or she will be called before a

Review Board where stiff explanations are expected. Nonconformance can result in a cadet being removed from the Academy.

Professors of student teachers are also strongly involved in supervisory and developmental activities. The small cadet/professor ratio at West Point facilitates individualized focus, attention, and continuous feedback. This intense interaction is mandatory to optimum cadet development. The same is also true for the training of student teachers. The stronger the feedback and mentoring we can provide for them, the fuller their development as teachers will be. Unfortunately, the large numbers of students teacher preparation faculty supervise and/or mentor often makes West Point's intense mentoring difficult or impossible to implement.

Management Style

Obviously, West Point is part of the Army and thus a totally military environment. There is no such thing as participatory or site based management. Administration is totally autocratic. If a professor or a cadet does not like it, too bad. Complaining or whining is definitely not allowed.

As a military environment, there is an established procedure for everything. Nothing is left to chance. If there is any doubt about an issue or as current events occur, there is a "briefing" whereby all the stakeholders involved meet to be "briefed" on present developments. There are no misunderstandings or miscommunications because they simply are not allowed.

Academically, each professor at West Point uses the exact same

syllabi for each section of each course. There is no such thing as academic freedom. At the end of each semester, all faculty that teach a specific course meet to evaluate what worked and what did not. Each semester courses are revamped for consistency and maximum effectiveness. Large course preparation manuals are developed per class. Regardless if the faculty member is permanent, rotating, or civilian, all professors work together to develop and revamp syllabi and course materials. This collaborative endeavor is both summative and formative in nature and is a positive for faculty team building, curricular improvement, and optimum cadet learning.

Cadet Training

Plebes begin military training on Reception Day, or "R-Day" their first day on campus as they enter "Beast Barracks," six weeks of intensive military "boot camp" training. They take an oath to support the United States Constitution. This oath remains in effect until they graduate and are commissioned as second lieutenants in the United States Army. At this point they take a new oath to support and **defend** the Constitution. According to Captain Roger Meyer (personal communication, March 28, 1996), Office of Public Affairs, basic training is part of the Cadet Leader Development System (CLDS), whose purpose is to transform young civilians to cadets, build self-discipline, and the new cadet's concept of duty.

Miliary training occurs primarily in the summers with instruction being cumulative. Following Beast Barracks and their

first academic year, second year cadets become team leaders. The third year they receive noncommissioned officer rank. Their last summer they are promoted as cadet officers. Both last summers the upper class cadets either work in Beast Barracks, training the new cadets, or in the Cadet Advanced Training (CAT) program where they actually function in the field Army. The purposes of the CAT programs are to train upper class cadets to effectively lead the Corps, to provide a working knowledge of the leadership responsibilities of noncommissioned officers, to provide realistic experiences while assigned as junior officers in an active Army unit, to provide cadets with a motivational, confidence building experience, and to teach a usable military skill. This is field-based training at its optimum as cadets work as quasi-officers directing enlisted men and women in daily leadership capacities. The correlation is identical to the philosophy of the Professional Development School model, giving preservice teachers optimum opportunity for actual field experience.

New faculty are trained in *Teaching at the United States Military Academy* (1996),an orientation manual for new faculty at West Point which also elaborates the importance of the cadet Honor Code. This states, "A cadet will not lie, steal or cheat, nor tolerate those who do." (p. 15) Captain Meyer reiterates, "The difference between good and bad leaders is often a question of character. Therefore, the Military Academy's core competencies are leadership and character." The Honor Code fosters, "a commitment to the moral and ethical excellence that is essential to a leader

of character," Meyer says. Specific teaching objectives are clearly delineated in the intensive course syllabi and preparation manuals.

Program Effectiveness

Because West Point is technically owned by the American people and authorized by Congress, it is always subject to legislative mandate and intense public scrutiny. There is competition among all universities for the best and the brightest of students. Because an appointment to West Point is difficult to get, there is prestige in receiving one. A guarantee of a job after graduation, a free college education, and the financial independence of receiving a salary one half that of a second lieutenant or approximately $6,5000 per year while a cadet are also perks which facilitate students wanting to attend the Academy. Recruitment is not a problem.

Political pressures are. A student can attend a less rigorous state university with a ROTC program and graduate as an Army officer with the same commission as a cadet. ROTC programs are also considerably cheaper. In today's cost conscious society, this has produced serious questions for Congress in regards to the existence and funding of West Point, the Air Force Academy, and Annapolis. Addressing these issues from a public relations standpoint is critical to the survival of the Academies.

Colonel Patrick Toffler of the Office of Planning, Policy, and Analysis produces data to substantiate the quality of graduates to quantify as well as quantify success (personal communication, March

29, 1996). Approximately 81% of cadets graduate in four years. Graduates must also serve a minimum of five years in the Army after graduation. Colonel Toffler's statistics show West Point has the highest retention rate of any other military source, including ROTCs, for keeping their officers in service after their obligatory time is complete. West Point graduates also score higher percentages than their counterparts in both performance evaluations and promotion rates the first time they are considered eligible for promotion. Colonel Toffler reiterates the importance of graduates, "who retain and perform exceptionally well as commissioned officers and who contribute distinguished serve as leaders of character for our nation."

According to the Admissions Office Information Bulletin (1996), "Since West Point graduates have begun competing, the United States Miliary Academy is the only academic institution in the nation ranking in the top four in both Rhodes and Hertz competitions." Peter Drucker (1995) also wrote in the Harvard Business Review, "West Point's core competence has been its ability to turn out leaders who deserve trust." These data help support the cost effectiveness issue as well as the value added aspect of leadership preparation which the Academies face for survival.

As with all universities, West Point seeks to curtail costs as much as possible. This is especially true in light of their financial situation being set by Congress, making them accountable to public scrutiny at all times. Because it is the military however, acquisitions are all channeled through a strict chain of

command, with a heavy top-down hierarchy. Teacher preparation programs also face these same issues with the growth of alternative certification programs (Terry and McNiece, 1991).

Continuous cadet monitoring and intense mentoring programs have led to the success of West Point students both as cadets and in subsequent military job performance. A focus on leadership training spanning military, academic, physical and character building is also paramount to success. "You can teach about leadership," says Colonel Forsythe, "but developing it is a life long process." Finally, cadets are taught, "to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong." These words from the Cadet Prayer are heavy with meaning and an even heavier ethos. They are also words that could have massive ramifications if all across America, in every classroom, in every school or university, teachers and parents together were urging students, "to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong." What inroads could be made into such societal problems as race relations, diversity, conflict resolution, team building, gang violence, teen pregnancy, and the spread of communicable diseases if all citizens and communities sought to work together to "choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong."

Implications for Teacher Education

West Point is doing many of the educational tenets that are research validated, but often are not feasible in teacher education. West Point has extremely small class sizes. Having an average class size of 15 is only a dream in most Schools of

Education. Possible ways of addressing this include community and university brainstorming and collaboration towards problem solving, advancement of innovative teaching techniques, utilization of distance learning and other technology, further development of collaborative linkages with businesses and industries, as well as the continual exhaustive search for outside funding for innovative programming.

West Point totally integrates instruction. The faculty go through regular strenuous course evaluations whereby professors collaborate together to build syllabi that are planned, integrated, implemented, and evaluated. Changes are made by consensus. A teamsmanship approach is taken to both curriculum and instruction. Does this reduce faculty autonomy, so treasured in traditional academia? Possibly. But the perspective thus changes from faculty-centered to learner-centered. This is an idea worth dialogue.

West Point's mentoring and support systems are excellent. They have limited enrollment. With an enrollment cap, they can maintain intense relationships with cadets, particularly plebes. In teacher education, we usually do not have the luxury of a 15 to 1 faculty/pupil ratio, but we can do everything possible to provide assistance and nurturance for all students and particularly those who are struggling. Lobbying legislatures, soliciting external funding, and collaboration with stakeholders should also be organized, systematic, implemented, and evaluated.

The hands-on application whereby upper class cadets actually

lead the corps and participate in summer activities in the regular Army are also incredibly strong field-based activities. Research has long proven the value of hands-on application of skills, linking theory to practice. West Point does this in a planned and systematic manner. This is something that colleges are attempting to utilize more and more today, particularly through the use of innovative internships in business, industry, and education both in the United States and around the world. Still, providing these challenges to West Point's extent in all universities would be a difficult task. Higher education restructuring of priorities, integrating of curriculum, and interdisciplinary collaboration are called for to give more students these opportunities.

The utilization of cohort groups of students which enter together, work, study, and collaborate together also is substantiated in the literature as a strong strategy for promoting optimum development (Fulmer and Marcano, 1997; Jacobson, 1996; Roberts, 1993). The utilization of technology, particularly the direct and immediate communication with professors through e-mail, is commendable and facilitative for cadet development.

The most striking observation though, is the passion and urgency with which West Point faculty see their role in creating success within the cadets. Part of this could be due to the rotating faculty and the visiting civilian professor system always providing a fresh sense of enthusiasm. This urgency for success is critical when dealing with America's defense. West Point definitely plays the patriotism card. The same urgency and passion

is also called for in teacher education. All professors should regain their enthusiasm, renew their zeal, and refocus on the urgency for which they entered the professorate in the first place. This could be the one lesson we could learn best from West Point. Providing strong military leaders is important. Providing strong leaders in all other arenas is also important. We should all refocus of the basics of character building because our common purpose, collectively, should be to provide America with teacher leaders of character to serve the common good.

Conclusions

Some say that West Point has the best of all worlds: high quality students, a solid budget, and a focused, motivated faculty. That is true. But it is also true that the rest of the world has exactly what we make it out to be. General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, West Point class of 1956, in an address to the Corps of Cadets said, "Don't ever forget that you are going to lead human beings. Their lives are going to be placed in your hands and you have to measure up. And the only way you are going to measure up is with competence and strong character. And you are learning that at West Point today. Believe it! And to hell with those who tell you not to believe it. And to hell with the skeptics. They won't be there. You will be." Schwarzkopf was fired up. There was urgency and passion in his message. He believed in his cause.

Shouldn't we?

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